

Testimony of Laura Amenta,
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Honorable members of the Appropriation Committee:

My name is Laura Amenta and I am the Chair of the The Children's Trust Fund Council. I am testifying today in opposition of Governor Rell's Proposed Midterm Budget Cuts to the Trust Fund.

The Trust Fund already reduced its budget by 20% when it was consolidated into the Department of Social Services. Now, the proposal is to reduce the Trust Fund's \$13 million budget by an additional 50%. This is a devastating proposal. Gone would be the Parent Trust Fund. Gone - the Children's Law Center Services. More importantly, this cut would virtually eliminate home visitation programs in New Haven and Hartford and reduce home visitation services by 30% for the rest of the state. Connecticut is at risk of losing an entire generation of progress in developing and delivering effective means of preventing child abuse and neglect.

I am concerned about the continued erosion of the child abuse prevention programs in a time when families need our services more than ever. The work of the Trust Fund is part of a core safety net and a first response to families under stress. One of the worst trends from the last recession (81-82) was a rise in child abuse, closely associated with unemployment, economic hardship and stress on parents. This trend is surfacing again. Child abuse is up sharply in parts of the nation hit hard by the recession.

The CTF is our states lead department for child abuse prevention. In just twelve short years, Connecticut has become a recognized leader in the area of child abuse prevention. Our *programs are held up as national models and win awards* – The Office of Juvenile Justice has given *NFN* proven program status and our *Help Me Grow* program is now being replicated nationwide by the Commonwealth Fund.

There are state programs that are not working and it makes sense for the State of Connecticut to cut ineffective programs. But the Trust Fund programs are some of the most effective successful programs. Our programs are rigorously researched. Our RBAs are impressive. Our programs work. Evaluations for Nurturing Families Network, a key program of the Trust Fund, find the incredibly high-risk families served make statistically significant gains in parenting skills, education, employment, and income. Even more importantly, the rates of maltreatment over the past 9 years averaged just 3%, well below the expected 20% of a high-risk population.

The program is cost effective as well, providing prevention services to one family costs the state \$3,000 per year – a fraction of the \$30,000 per year it costs CT for one substantiated case of abuse or neglect. Sadly, children who experience abuse and neglect often end up as adults on the caseloads of DMHAS, or Department of Corrections. Studies have shown that for every dollar spent on prevention, the state can actually save \$6 in these long term costs.

From a fiscal standpoint the proposed cuts to the Trust Fund make no sense. The proposed budget cuts to the Trust Fund equal \$6.8 million. But the University of Connecticut (Center for the Study of Culture, Health and Human Development) has estimated that the impact of the Governor's proposal will result in an expected 320 additional new cases of child abuse and neglect referred to DCF, at an annual cost to the State of \$9.5 million. From a fiscal standpoint this makes no sense – the state will end up spending an additional \$2.7 million, just from the loss of Trust Fund programs.

There can be no more critical time than now to preserve the work of the Children's Trust Fund. I urge you to do what you can to preserve prevention programs that not only save lives, but ultimately save our public dollars. Thank you.